

POEMS OF
SAN FRANCISCO

A Gift For
Epiphany 1996

By
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San Francisco, CA

A WORD OF INTRODUCTION

These poems were written in the late 1960's when I first came to the Bay Area. Although I stayed at friends' homes for some months in 1966, I did not reside in The City until 1981. Helen and I are here for the foreseeable future.

Like other poems I have shared with you over the years, these have varying quality, enough so that Milton, Frost, Whitman, Dickinson, and others have no need to fear for their places in literary history. That is not why I share them, but that some modest personal gift might express my esteem and appreciation for what you have brought to our lives. I apologize for the pedestrian binding; you deserve better.

I hope you enjoy these poems. If they inspire you to visit The City, give a call. If we are at home and are not obligated somehow, we would be delighted to visit with you.

Marcel B. Matley
San Francisco, CA
January 1996

FLYING TO THE BAY AREA

But cloud, but cloud
both beneath and above
and on a level too.

THE BAY BRIDGE

As my car passes
beneath these towers
my spirit soars
to their height.

SMALL POEMS

The wise Mother-Sea
clothes her City with cloud
nor smothers it in fog.

From the East Bay Hills
across a Bay of cloud
how grand our Bay City!

This bridge
with four towers
of triply X'd strength:
sign of strength
my soul wants.

The Bay Bridge wore
its amber beads
strung on steel and
sequin of car light.

THE DAY CAROL NEIL LEFT

These small poems
are remembrance
of a morning
when a friend left.

An undecided
drizzle today -
this evening though
it will turn to rain.

I cross my bridge,
silver with joy,
red with sorrow -
still much my symbol!

The City - clean, clear,
shadowed and sunny,
bland and beautiful -
yours and mine.

ON TELEGRAPH HILL

The half moon
shining on
the whole world -
other half
shining on
no world.

She was singing;
I paused to hear
her sing and laugh,
then she danced away.

Her sadness stayed me -
may it pass
and joy come
as beautiful as she.

THE GOLDEN GATE

This blood-red bridge
tenuously holding
two shores together
across a gateway
of grayish waters.

EVENING INTIMATIONS ON SAN FRANCISCO

You were meant to be mine,
but as I watched you
softly illumined by a million souls
in the leisurely evening
of an Indian Summer,
I knew that separation
which precedes all conjoining.

How long since I saw
sand sensuously accepting
the sea's seeking lip,
painted a passionate
moonlit white.

Bridges: one red, one white,
each a bridge to measure,
not abridge, our distance
and each an exit for me.

Beauty is yours
and ugliness theirs
who rape you;
and beyond you
beauty is uglier
and ugliness more beautiful.

You enticer of seekers
and emitter of the disillusioned:
one I know will move
into the vortex of your seemingliness
and another will leave.

I am free of your allure
but how unsure am I
that I shall bless today
from which I am cured
of your curse.

As men of desire and daydream
surround the woman of whom
their desire and dream most despair
so Angel Island and Sausalito,
Yerba Buena and Peninsula,
Alcatraz and a thousand ships
surround you,
never impound you,
keep the East at bay
and in their despair
labor their wedded
over their wanton interest.

The only hills in the world
for which down
is but a different up,
which are beautied and bejeweled
as befit an Eastern Queen,
across which the car thrusts us
tantalizing us
with half hidden vista,
shyly shadowed house,
leaves lit mercury blue
and the climb and drop
over another crest.

They all come to you
seeking to be as you are
and leave you
and with you their wish
and with their wish your allure
and with your allure their love
and with their love
all they left behind
and all they came to seek.
How can they know
once come
they may go
but cannot leave you?

More than just the world's navies
can be harbored in your Bay.

ON A DIFFERENT NOTE

I listened to what were surely
quotations from dreams I've had
as the Yerba Buena Island Tunnel
bore us through its immaculate bosom
onto an expanse of silvered steel
and into The City's blood stream.

The dreary cloud seemed less dreary
and the endless rain rained gently
as gently as word precipitated
from the realm of my hidden thought.

Face to face with you across the morning's
earliest cup of coffee and breakfast
the veil for the shy face of my soul
naturally hung loosened and faced
the unpretentious presence of yours.

HYDE & PACIFIC AFTER 1 A.M.

The City slumbers
to the cables' caroling
and rhythmic rattling.

A motor mutters
about its late homecoming
as planes hum in bass.

Mechanized music
makes the night mellower
for lonely night folk.

The beat slowly dies
as cars gong coverlets
to Bay's measured moan.

Then cables are stilled;
tomorrow brings new music
while we pass through sleep.

THE CITY

The sea behind the City
was set afire
and we watched the smoke
smother bridge and hills.
Even Alcatraz could only
sit amazed, blinking
at the momentary marvel renewed
the millionth time.
We walked City walkways
threading our way
between standers and idlers
unseeking seekers
the sought and solitary
and companioned walkers,
weaving with our wandering
fabric of memory.
We treasure the wonder
of our Island watch
yet what is the wonder
of a sea set afire
about the craggy skirt
of this water-wound City
when oneself is wrapped once more
in its pulsing warmth?

SAN FRANCISCO SEEN FROM ARLINGTON
AVENUE ON A WINTER EVENING

The City was a facade
floating on a bay of sky.

Lest it become too ethereal,
an umbilical cord of steel
fed it some substance of earth.

In turn,
its light pulsated
across that cord
to illumify the prosaic here.

If this were all
we saw of The City
it would soon become
the myth of our memory
rather than
the mecca of our merriment.

